

HABS No. IA-169

F. W. McCall's Marble Shop
Iowa Penn. Central Regional Shopping Center
214 High Ave. West
Oskaloosa
Mahaska County
Iowa

HABS
IOWA
62-OSK,
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HABS
IOWA
62-02k,
4-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

F. W. MCCALL'S MARBLE SHOP

HABS No. IA-169

Location: 214 High Ave. West, Oskaloosa, Mahaska County, Iowa.

Present Owner: Elizabeth McCurdy.

Present Use: McCall Monuments. Scheduled for demolition in fall 1984.

Significance: McCall Monuments is one of Oskaloosa's oldest retail business establishments and is significant to the development of the western section of downtown. The business was founded in 1862 by Francis W. McCall, who built this building in 1874. The business remained in the McCall family until 1949.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The founder of McCall Monuments, Francis W. McCall, was born in Galopolis, Ohio, in 1831, and moved to LaSalle County, Illinois, after the death of his father in 1838. McCall was determined to learn the trade of wagon maker and served an apprenticeship earning \$4 a month. In 1852 he married Emma Woodward and soon after, the couple started for the west in a wagon. They traveled to Iowa and arrived in Oskaloosa in May 1855, where McCall engaged in the carpentry and wagon-making business. The business became quite successful and he began to acquire property in Oskaloosa.¹

In 1862, McCall started the marble business that made him famous in Oskaloosa. Through his energy and good management, McCall's business grew to one of the most extensive businesses of its kind in the state of Iowa. Eventually, McCall also conducted business in neighboring states.² F. W. McCall had gained the reputation for having a splendid corps of hands in his shop, turning out some of the most beautiful examples of marble work, including tombstones and monuments. McCall later introduced granites into his business because he realized that marble could not withstand the elements as well as the harder granite.

F. W. McCall's monument business was originally located in a one-story frame building at 115 High Ave. West. The storefront consisted of two large windows and large windowed doors in the center with a rectangular clapboard facade above. In 1874, McCall began to build the brick structure at 212 High Ave. West that exists today. Across the street was Mattison's Grocery. Three other structures--a second building for McCall's marble business, the Oskaloosa Gas Company, and Dr. Thomas K. Brewster's dentist office--were built

¹"F. W. McCall," Oskaloosa Herald, October 10, 1907, p. 7.

²The History of Mahaska County, Iowa (Des Moines: Union Historical Society, 1878), 581-582.

simultaneously on the block where McCall built his shop. Each building was two stories high with 20'-wide storefronts. The building farthest to the east on the alley was built for F. W. McCall's marble shop. It was 20' x 50' in plan, built of brick with an iron front and galvanized cornice.³ The construction of the building is masonry load-bearing walls. A cornice divided the first and second stories and was decorated with scrolled modillions and fluted iron columns, which survive. The columns originally had acanthus-leaf capitals. "F. W. McCall" was printed on the frieze. The storefront consists of rectangular windows on either side of the columns and above the door. The upper half of the building has four segmental-arched windows and an ornately bracketed metal cornice (see HABS photo IA-169-1). The October 22, 1874, edition of the Oskaloosa Herald stated that the whole block was a credit to the town and that it was another monument to the indomitable energy of Frank McCall.

The front part of the McCall building was partitioned for an office and the remainder of the building was used by his workmen. In 1874, McCall had sixteen employees who turned out marble works of every description, and turned out more work than any other house in the state.⁴

From 1881 until 1886, John Gilchrist shared an undivided one-half interest of the business with F. W. McCall. McCall operated the business until his death in October 1907. The business was then passed on to his two sons, Louis H. and Charles S. McCall, who changed the name of the business to McCall Granite Works and continued to uphold the fine tradition that their father had started. In 1909 McCall Granite Works erected the Mahaska Monument that stands in the Oskaloosa public square.

In 1928, Louis H. McCall retired from the business and sold his half-interest to Wilbur E. McCurdy. Charles McCall and Wilbur McCurdy remained partners until Charles's death in 1939, when his widow assumed the partnership. McCurdy purchased Mrs. McCall's interest in 1949, becoming sole owner. In the early 1960s, Wilbur's son, John, became a partner in the firm and in 1965 John and Elizabeth McCurdy purchased the business. Elizabeth was the step-daughter of Charles McCall. Elizabeth McCurdy remained owner of the business until July 1, 1983, when she sold the business to Lee Barnett.

Through the years, some alterations have occurred to the McCall Monuments building. The modillioned cornice that divided the first and second stories was removed, windows were blocked, and the acanthus-leaf design was removed from the capitals of the iron columns (see HABS photo IA-169-3). A projecting sign was added to advertise the business. The name of the business had been changed in the 1940s to its present name of McCall Monuments.

³"New Buildings," Oskaloosa Herald, October 22, 1874, p. 2.

⁴"New Buildings," Oskaloosa Herald, October 22, 1874, p. 2.

ORIGINAL AND SUBSEQUENT OWNERS

Reference is to deeds in the County Auditor's Office, Mahaska County Courthouse, Oskaloosa, Iowa.

- 1881 Deed, October 26, 1881, Volume A-1: 85
F. W. McCall to John Gilchrist, undivided one-half interest
- 1886 Deed, January 14, 1886, Volume A-1: 85.
John Gilchrist to F. W. McCall, undivided one-half interest
- 1919 Referee's Deed, March 20, 1919, Volume A-2: 76
Ver Floeg, Referee, to Dolly and Helen McCall
- 1921 Deed, July 28, 1921, Volume A-2: 76
Helen McCall, wife, to Louis H. McCall
- 1937 Deed, June 2, 1937, Volume A-2: 76
Louis H. McCall and wife to Elizabeth McCurdy, undivided one-half interest
- 1971 Deed, October 5, 1971, Volume A-3: 76
Charles W. and Betty McCall to Donald Eugene McCurdy, undivided one-half interest

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Interview:

An interview was conducted with Elizabeth McCurdy at her home in Oskaloosa on June 22, 1984. Mrs. McCurdy is the stepdaughter of Charles McCall, son of Francis W. McCall, who founded the McCall Monuments business. Mrs. McCurdy owned and operated McCall Monuments from 1965 until 1983. A variety of photographs, newspaper articles, and other valuable information was obtained from Mrs. McCurdy.

B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Mahaska County Transfer Books, Auditor's Office, Mahaska County Courthouse, Oskaloosa, Iowa.

Mahaska County Death Records, County Clerk's Office, Mahaska County Courthouse, Oskaloosa, Iowa.

Runnels, Earl, "McCall Granite Works," Oskaloosa, Iowa, Folder, Box 28, Federal Writer's Project, Special Collections, University of Iowa Library, Iowa City, Iowa.

C. Secondary and published sources:

"F. W. McCall," Oskaloosa Herald, October 10, 1907, p. 7.

Hedge, Mahoah. Past and Present Mahaska County, Iowa. Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1906.

The History of Mahaska County, Iowa. Des Moines: Union Historical Company, 1878.

"McCalls to Hold 100th Anniversary Open House." Oskaloosa Herald, June 1962.

"McCall Monument Company Observes 100th Anniversary." Oskaloosa Herald, January 31, 1963.

"New Buildings." Oskaloosa Herald, October 22, 1874.

The Oskaloosa Chautauqua [booklet]. August 14-24, 1917.

Oskaloosa Daily Herald and Oskaloosa Herald. Various articles from years between 1864 and 1970.

"Pioneer Passes Away." Oskaloosa Herald, October 10, 1907.

Polk's Oskaloosa City Directories. 1887, 1898-99, 1907-08, 1919-20, 1924-25, 1931, 1939, 1947, 1951, 1965, 1973, 1978, 1980.

PROJECT INFORMATION

Plans call for demolition of this building in fall 1984. This historical documentation was completed by the Urban Programming Corporation during May, June and July of 1984. It is one portion of the historical/architectural recordation of seven city blocks in downtown Oskaloosa prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). For more information, see HABS No. IA-147.

This documentation was completed under the direction of Gregory D. Kendrick, Historian for the National Park Service, Rocky Mountain Regional Office. Project supervisor was Peter Sortino of the Urban Programming Corporation. Historical documentation was completed by Diane Bowman of the Urban Programming Corporation. Photographer for the project was David W. Preston of St. Louis, Missouri.